

How the 1994 *Many Families Many Literacies Declaration of Principles* Prepares U.N. Member States for The 2019 High Level Political Forum

The History of the *Many Families Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles*

In 1994 many young women with little children in the United States were being required by social services to enroll in family literacy programs to keep their benefits. At the same time U.S. courts were mandating attendance by vulnerable mothers in family literacy programs if they wanted to keep their children. Many of these young women had been sexually and physically abused and some were being trafficked. Some were also struggling with physical illnesses for which they were considered ineligible for medical care. One young woman suffering from advanced stages of uterine cancer was denied surgery because she had no medical insurance, but even though she was unable to sit because of the intensity of the pain she was still forced to attend GED classes in order to receive food stamps and keep her three children. She died in the struggle.¹

The monetization of misery – refusing medical aid to dying women while making money from commercial literacy programs that they were mandated to attend to “educate” them – is as heinous now as it was then. Thus my intent in presenting the 1994 family literacy declaration of principles is to raise concern about this predatory phenomenon and to argue that the monetization of the misery of extreme poverty presents a significant risk to the positioning of the U.N. and U.N. member states in relationship to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 30) and peacebuilding efforts around the world.² It is a moral imperative and an ethical responsibility that the U.N. work closely with NGOs and civil society to ensure global, regional and local initiatives that create safe, resilient and sustainable local communities, to foster greater involvement and local participation, and by so doing, make every effort to reclaim the human rights of families – especially women and children who are trying to cope with abusive circumstances in their struggle to survive.

¹ *Toxic Literacies: Exposing the Injustice of Bureaucratic Texts*: Denny Taylor. Heinemann, September 1996.

² All supporting documentation can be read and is available for download at: <https://www.dennytaylor.com/>

The Origins of Family Literacy Is Descriptive Not Prescriptive

By 1994, family literacy, which was a *descriptive* term originating in my doctoral dissertation, had become *prescriptive* and punitive, coopted by the federal and state governments there was a stigma to attending family literacy programs. At the same time, family literacy had also garnered the attention of international educational publishers, and *prescriptive* family literacy programs were rapidly becoming a lucrative commercial enterprise, jumping continents with no local relevance anywhere in the world.

Many educators in universities, schools and communities were deeply concerned about the negative consequences of the twisting of the concept of family literacy, and I wrote at the time:

In educational publications there is talk of the disappeared parent and of families who will have to change cultures if they want to become literate and help their children learn to read and write. Illiteracy is portrayed as a family problem, and it is clear from the rhetoric that many believe it is the family that must be fixed.

Negative images of both parents and children are a part of our everyday lives. But when a private organization develops "national" standards for family literacy programs that include "well-designed induction activities and friendly intake procedures," it's time to act.

Without any funding I invited international literacy scholars – anthropologists, sociologists and linguists – to participate in a forum on family literacy in Tucson, Arizona. I called educators in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Mexico, asking them to join us, and I received calls from educators in Australia and South America. News spread by word of mouth of what was rapidly becoming a global forum including educators from South Africa. More and more people made arrangements to attend and many practitioners working with families in communities were also invited.

The end result was an International Declaration on Families and Literacy published in 1997 the book, *Many Families Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles*,³ which has direct relevance to the 2019 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) at the United Nations that will focus on “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.”

³ *Many Families, Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles*: Denny Taylor (Editor). Heinemann. May 1997. Due to the unanticipated size of the forum Heinemann provided \$5,000 in lieu of any royalties for the publication of a book based on the family literacy declaration. The money was used to rent the meeting rooms at a Tucson hotel and to pay for the lunches and coffee for participants. The remaining funds were divided between the participants who had traveled the farthest and those who had the greatest need.

The Social Construction of the Many Families Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles

To prepare for the 1994 Tucson family literacy forum, we⁴ asked participants to send a brief summary of their concerns about the family literacy movement and the development of national program standards. Our request hit a nerve. We were deluged with print, and we decided to organize the forum around the ten themes that emerged from our analysis of the documents that we had received. When participants arrived at the forum they were asked to join one of the ten working groups that would address these issues.

The forum began with presentations by David Barton from the United Kingdom; Bram Fisher from Canada; Audrey Grant and Julie Spreadbury from Australia; and Judith Kalman from Mexico. Then a number of American educators spoke: Elsa Auerbach from the University of Massachusetts; Shirley Thornton from the California State Department of Education; Klaudia Rivera, the director of Programa de Educación de El Barrio in New York; and Luis Moll from the University of Arizona. These presentations concluded with Jennie DeGroat, from the University of New Mexico and Diné from the Navajo Nation.

Jennie DeGroat spoke of the adverse effects of the dominant mono-cultural perspective, which excludes indigenous families. She told participants at the forum that the "national" family literacy standards were being used to evaluate families who are members of the Navajo Nation, and she presented specific examples of the inappropriate use of the standards to evaluate Diné families in her own community.

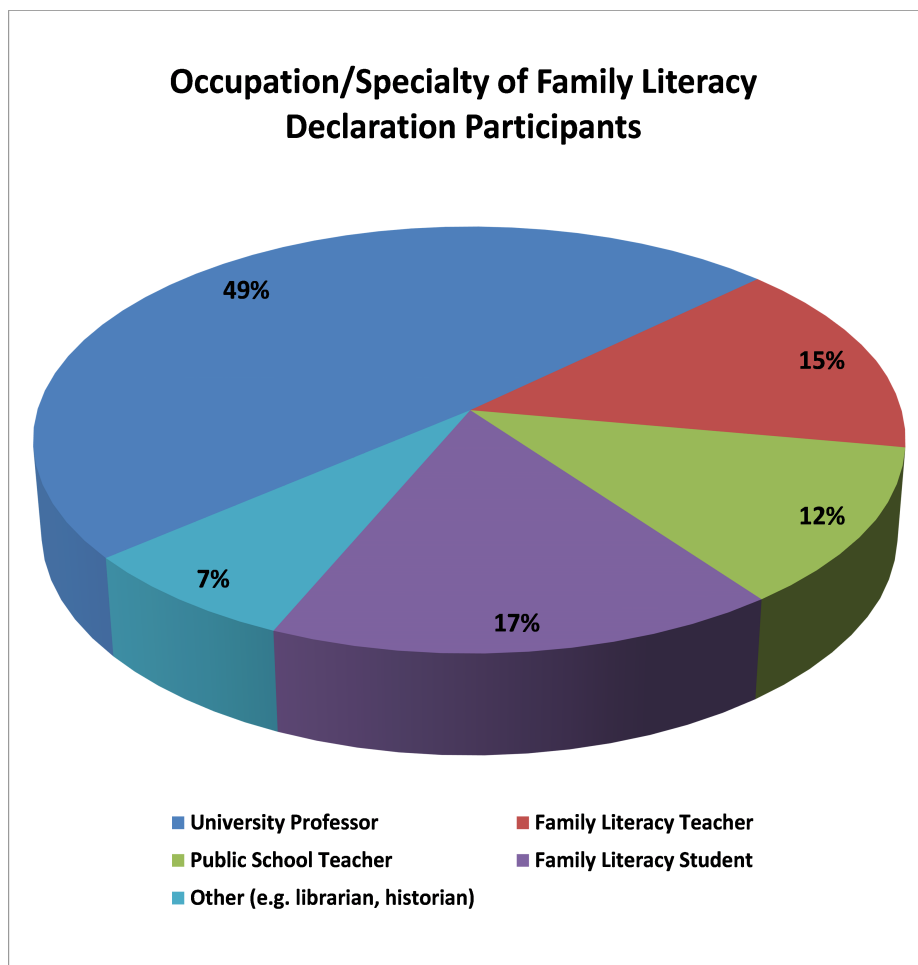
"The people are never asked about their perspective to solve their own problems," Jennie DeGroat said. "Instead of meeting standards, educators should be concerned with helping families construct knowledge and share in the learning process." She put her hand on her heart and said, "Too bad people don't include *me* in their documentation."

After the opening presentations participants met in working groups that were charged with the task of developing a series of international principles that could be used to guide the development of family literacy initiatives and programs. At regular intervals each group reported back to the entire forum and received feedback from the participants of other groups.

Participants shared their diverse experiences of working with families and studying literacy. They argued about critical issues, aired concerns, and built frameworks. The energy level was

⁴ The "we" refers the doctoral students at the University of Arizona who worked with me to organize the forum.

high and the discussions were memorable. Each group made notes, with specific wording for the principles, often reading their proposed principles aloud and collaboratively editing. Doctoral students from the University of Arizona also documented the proceedings, writing ethnographic notes and making audiotapes of the discussions. The first draft of the preamble and the seven sets of principles were based on all of this documentation.



Other international, regional and local forums followed in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, South Africa, U.K., and U.S., and family literacy practitioners participated in these spirited dialogues and wrote articles that were included in the book. *Many Families Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles* was the result of this enormous collaborative effort. The ethnic and racial heritage of the participants in the declaration was: 63% White; 20% Black; 13% Latino; 3% Indigenous; and 1% Asian.

I wrote at the time that we did not know the impact of the declaration, but we can surmise that the completely voluntary collaboration of such diverse groups of people in creating a counter narrative to the punitive, commercial and pejorative narratives that were dominant at the time

continues to be a major positive force today.

The Importance of the *Many Families Many Literacies Declaration of Principles* to U.N. Member States

This counter narrative of hope and possibility can be found in many countries. Confirmation of this is supported by an analysis of the family literacy initiatives in U.N. member states, which reveals that there are both implicit and explicit connections between family literacy initiatives, sustainable development and peacebuilding. In addition to teaching reading and writing and providing educational opportunities, there are many family literacy initiatives (LINK) that focus on using literacy to address locally identified problems that impact the health and wellbeing of families.

These initiatives include participation of families in desert, forest and coastal communities, families challenged by the lack of such basic needs as clean water, safe food, housing, health care, and families living in regions of armed conflict and in communities struggling with peace building & establishing good governance.⁵ Most importantly, family literacy initiatives in U.N. member states reaffirm the important role of women and youth in meeting the sustainable development goals, and establish that there is a substantial link between women's full and meaningful involvement in peacebuilding efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict, and the participation of women increases the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of these efforts.⁶

But there are also existential caveats. The issues of the monetization of misery and the predatory practices of multinational corporations that led to the original diverse gathering in 1994 of literacy scholars, family literacy practitioners and participants in family literacy programs are even more prevalent today, and commercial interests are pervading initiatives established to meet sustainability development goals and many peacebuilding initiatives. For example, there are significant differences between SDG initiatives that start with people and SDG initiatives that start with AI, big data and sustainable infrastructure.

⁵ <https://www.dennytaylor.com/> Family Literacy and the Future of Humanity: A Proposal for a Global Family Literacy Initiative. Download: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5abc153cb1059858310b37e1/t/5b433ddc03ce641f981996b3/1531134747292/Family+Literacy+and+the+Future+of+Humanity.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.dennytaylor.com/> Family Literacy and the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture. Download: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5abc153cb1059858310b37e1/t/5b433e321ae6cf2d200d1f76/1531134739063/Family+Literacy+and+UN+Peacebuilding+Architecture.pdf>

The former is represented here by “learning cities”⁷ which begin with the local needs of families and draw on their problem solving capabilities. These cities are at the intersection of SDG 4 (inclusive quality education and lifelong learning), SDG 11 (inclusive and sustainable cities and human settlements), and SDG 12 (sustainable production and consumption), as well as, to varying degrees, the other SDGs. The latter is represented by, “smart cities”⁸ which begin with technology to meet the SDGs, and in the presentations at the 2018 HLPF focused on cities as “powerful engines of economic growth, fueled by intensive interpersonal communication and high concentrations of specialized skills.”

The stark contrast between the family centered “learning cities” and the business centered “smart cities” was evident by those who attended these vastly different 2018 HLPF presentations. The former, which had a well-established human rights perspective, was held in a nearby church, while the latter with a high-finance business perspective was actually accommodated with a meeting room at the U.N. At the learning cities meeting there was a diverse audience of many nationalities and racial identities with almost equal numbers of women and men. At the smart cities meeting there were mostly men in attendance who gave the impression of power and privilege of senior executives representing the business community. The noticeable differences between the attendees at the two sessions were matched by the noticeable differences in the presentations. In the learning cities presentations there were families, little children and elderly grandparents whose memories were failing them. The emphasis was on caring for one another and on working together, and the engagement in many intergenerational learning projects, including innovative projects on computers. In the smart cities presentations there were no families, no children, no old people, just bandwidth, connectivity and lucrative commercial opportunities.

The trajectory of learning cities and smart cities creates a cautionary tale, and it will come as no surprise that the IIASA *TWI2050 Report: Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*⁹ includes “smart cities” as one of the six “exemplary transformations” to push down the existential risks confronting humanity. But at the end of the day the power and profit paradigm turns the responsibility for the SDGs over to the private sector and it is families who pay. The life sustaining reasons against being so coopted are many.¹⁰

⁷ Learning Cities: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies through education. New York, UN Church Center HLPF 10 July 2018.

⁸ Shaping Smarter and More Sustainable Cities: Striving for Sustainable Development Goals, New York UNHQ, HLPF 12 July 2018

⁹ TWI2050 Report: Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, IIASA.
<http://www.iiasa.ac.at/web/home/research/twi/Report2018.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.dennytaylor.com/> The Most Dangerous time in Human History: How Family Literacy in U.N. Member States Has Become a Conduit for Sustaining Peace. Download:
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5abc153cb1059858310b37e1/t/5b433e60352f532eead52729/1531133536314/How+Family+Literacy+Has+Become+Essential+To+Conflict+Prevention.pdf>

It is for this reason that the *Many Families Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principle* is of critical importance in framing the 2019 HLPF. The declaration positions all those who will take part in the 2019 forum alongside the families who will be impacted by their decisions. The principles could even be turned into a checklist for the evaluation of prospective presentations to ensure that the U.N. is true to the mission of the HLPF, which is “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.” Here is the declaration: *Many Families Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles*

Principles about Families

Families share the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of their everyday lives.

- Families' funds of knowledge and ways of knowing are complexly structured and highly dependent on the cultures to which they belong, the languages they speak, and the social, economic, and political circumstances of their daily lives.
- Such a view of family life may be thought of as processual – in process – and evolutionary as well as dynamic and developmental. A processual view of family life shifts our thinking away from abstract notions such as "normative states.”
- Simplistic statements about families that do not take into consideration the complexities of their everyday lives – such as "low levels of literacy are the result of poor parenting" – cannot be supported and should not be made.

The voices of family members are important. "Experts" should not speak for them, own the talk, or write family literacy programs in which their voices are not heard.

Families have the right to define themselves.

- Families have members of all ages and should not be narrowly defined as "undereducated parents and their children."
- Families are both biological and social. They span the generations from great-grandparents to great-grandchildren. They bring together people who want to spend their lives together; sometimes there are no children.
- Definitions of family need to include the men, women, and children who are separated from their families because of political, social, or economic reasons – family members who are refugees, those in political exile, and those who work as migrants in other countries to support their families at home.
- Such definitions also need to include children who might be living away from their biological parents in foster care, on the streets, or in institutionalized care.

Racial and ethnic identity should not be used explicitly or implicitly to suggest that families live in households that lack social and intellectual resources.

- We should resist the pressure not to recognize the rich resources of some families simply because they are socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged.
- We also question whether some families have fewer job opportunities and educational opportunities because they are denied such opportunities by the dominant society.
- When families experience racism and prejudice they often also experience hopelessness and despair. Economic hardship, poor health, and the lack of adequate housing all take their toll, and sometimes leave families unable to cope with the problems that they face in their everyday lives.
- Many families who speak multiple languages and have complex literacies still live in poverty, their lives disregarded or considered a burden by the society in which they live.
- When all families are valued by society all of society benefits.

Families are the primary literacy resource for their children.

- All families should be given support in their important role of initiating and maintaining their children's literacy.
- Once we take into account the cultural and linguistic complexities of family life, the ways of knowing, and the funds of knowledge that families share, we can no longer assume that living in a low-income community means that a mother or father cannot read and write.

Principles about Language and Literacy

All languages have on equal potential to convey the full range of human thought and experience.

- All languages have the potential to be written down.
- In cultures in which the indigenous languages do not have a long written tradition, the indigenous languages are as sophisticated and complex as those in cultures that do have a long written tradition.
- The division between oral and written language has come to be questioned. Older views claimed that literacy was unique in that it allowed meaning to be represented autonomously, without reference to context.
- Recent studies have shown that there are many features of what has traditionally been thought of as oral discourse in written language, and that many people can best demonstrate their understanding of written language in oral forms and vice versa.

A fundamental right of every family is to be literate in the language of their choice.

- Family members, both adults and children, should have an opportunity to become literate in their home language.
- Literacy in the home language can enhance literacy learning in a second language.
- Conversely, ignoring the home language and/or literacy in the home language has the potential to delay literacy learning in a second language – often the dominant language of the Society.
- The acceptance of a diversity of languages and cultures can lead to tolerance, understanding, equity, and a celebration of creativity.
- Literacy is important to the issue of disappearing languages in that writing down a language can be a way of valuing that language and a way of extending its uses.

Like all language, literacy develops in response to everyday needs.

- Literacy is not a neutral technology. It is never a fixed or static structure. Like family life, both language and literacy are processual – continuously in process – and evolutionary as well as dynamic and developmental.
- In all societies family members, including children, are involved directly or indirectly in literate activities.
- In many societies, children begin the development of the most socially common and evident forms of literacy before they begin school.
- Literacy is embedded in everyday activities that are a part of family life. The use of complex symbolic systems is an everyday phenomenon constitutive of and grounded in daily lives of family members. Literacy is not usually the focus of attention. The primary focus is on the accomplishment of the task in which the use of literacy plays a part.
- Lived experiences of literate activities in everyday life vary in many ways. They depend on the context of the situation, the purpose of the literacy event, and the needs and desires of the participants in the event.
- These activities may not be those most valued by schools or by the self-appointed arbiters of what people "should" be reading and writing.

Families continually develop and share their literacies including marginalized and often unrecognized local literacies.

- The development of new literacy uses by family members usually follows rather than precedes changes in life views and circumstances.
- When family members take hold of a new form of literacy, they transform it for their own use.

- Families extend the uses of literacy, developing their own personal and shared local literacies.

Literacy is embedded in different ideologies, in different political perspectives, and in different political agendas.

- Literacy practices are specific to their political and ideological contexts, and their consequences vary situationally.
- Ever present in the background of the lives of families are the literacies that are intrinsic to the political life – local, national, and international – of the societies in which they live.
- The increased powers accorded to literacy have sharpened the need for families to have a broad spectrum of literacies.
- Literacy in and of itself does not promote cognitive advancement, social mobility, or social progress.
- The notion of "functional literacy" is frequently artificially defined to support political and ideological agendas.
- Similarly, literacy is often erroneously equated with intelligence, and charges of "il-literacy" are used to attack the poor and cultural groups who are marginalized in different societies.
- Literacy is commercialized by those working within the dominant ideological and political frameworks and sold in aberrant forms to families who are often struggling to feed and clothe their children.
- Often literacy is marketed across international borders. Literacy learning should not be a product to be bought and sold.

Ethical Principles about Family Literacy Research and Program Development

Literacy is a universal human right.

- It is not a commodity to be bought or sold, researched for profit, prescribed medicinally, or doled out for punishment.
- The potential for violation of family rights is considerable, especially when the demands of society conflict with the needs of families.

There is a constant need for family literacy educators to examine their own practices.

- Family literacy programs raise fundamental ethical issues because of the power imbalance between program providers and program participants.

- Those enrolled in family literacy programs are likely to be at a disadvantage in their relations with family literacy educators and the producers of literacy programs with regard to economics, social status, or power to influence the design of curriculum and instruction.
- The possibility always exists that educators might unwittingly participate in the victimization of both parents and children.
- Family literacy educators and private corporations producing literacy programs often do derive direct benefit from the work.

It is essential that social agencies and the criminal justice system examine policies that require participation in family literacy programs.

- In the United States, participation in family literacy programs is sometimes a prerequisite for social services. Similarly, participation in a family literacy program has become court-mandated for some parents and their children.
- In such situations, family literacy programs become a form of punishment and the role of the literacy educator changes from facilitator to corrections officer, a transformation of professional positions that is cause for serious concern.
- Every family literacy educator should be free from external restrictions such as mandated participation, inappropriate standardized assessment, and unrealistic funding requirements, so that the well being of the participants and their families can be the primary concern.

Researchers in academic institutions should similarly scrutinize their own practices.

- Family literacy research raises fundamental ethical issues of power and profit.
- Questions need to be asked about the extent to which academic research on families and literacy is conducted for personal gain in the form of financial and/or professional advancement.
- Questions should also be asked about the relevance of the research to the everyday lives of the families who participate in literacy studies.
- The family's general well-being and personal needs and interests should always override the personal needs and interests of the researcher.

Policy makers should also hold themselves accountable.

- Blaming the lack of literacy skills for the ills of the society is a national and international form of political propaganda.
- There are many people who have multiple literacies, and some who also speak multiple languages, yet still live in poverty.

- There is systemic denial that the social conditions in which many families live is politically structured. Soweto is symbolic of such conditions, but there are similar situations in many different countries, including the United States.
- The lack of housing, the lack of jobs, and the lack of adequate medical care are often at the root of the difficulties that families face.
- Again, literacy is a universal human right and should not be used as an excuse for racist public policy.

Multinational corporations that are unlikely to examine their commercialization of literacy should be held accountable for the packaging and sale of their literacy products.

- Multinational corporations profit directly when literacy is packaged and marketed both nationally and internationally.
- Often their products are sold to families who are least able to afford them.
- Families buy such products because of the negative rhetoric – statements about "declining reading scores, escalating dropout rates, and the alarming rise of illiteracy even among many high school graduates" – and because of the unsubstantiated and exaggerated claims of the success of the program.

Pedagogical Principles about Families and Literacy Programs

No single, narrow definition of family literacy can do justice to the richness and complexity of families and literacy.

- Underlying the rhetoric of many deficit-driven family literacy programs is the belief that the poor have to be saved from themselves.
- The process of defining family literacy cannot be left in the hands of those outside the families and communities that are affected by the decision-making process.
- The culture of the community and the experiences of the families who live in the community must be the foundation of all family literacy programs.
- Literacy cannot be taught in isolation from the functions it serves in the lives of the families who participate in family literacy programs.

Educators should recognize the expertise of families and view all family members as knowledgeable, capable learners.

- When working with families, the educator is the novice and the family members participating in the program are the experts of their own experience.

- Narrow definitions of families and literacy that lead to the establishment of professional "experts" in family literacy should be rejected.
- Family literacy should receive increased attention by educators but educators should seriously question the establishment of family literacy as a separate discipline.

At the core of any locally developed literacy program is the reciprocal practices that are established between family members and educators.

- *Confianza* is the word often used to describe reciprocal relationships that are built on mutual trust.
- Locally developed literacy programs that are based on mutual trust – *confianza* – recognize that parents should be active in the decision making process.
- Pre-established, prepackaged, or "nationally developed" programs by definition fail to meet local requirements of community development.
- Every member of the community, including caregivers in social agencies and teachers in schools, can play a key role in supporting families in the continuing process of literacy development.
- Educators understand that life changes are a personal decision. Teachers should be supported in their efforts to view education as an emancipatory process that provides opportunities for all families – especially parents and children – to work to change their life circumstances in ways that make sense to them.
- In school situations and in nationally and privately funded family literacy programs, family members and teachers should be equal participants in the development of the curriculum.

Literacy programs should support families in ways that make sense to both parents and children.

- All language and literacy experiences should be based on knowledge about and respect for the diverse language and literacy resources of students and their families.
- Literacy programs should support the everyday lives of families. They should recognize the important relationships that parents and children have with their communities and schools.
- It is essential that educators supporting the literacies of parents and children work with families, household members, and communities to identify literacy practices which are meaningful to them, and then use these descriptions to determine how programs could be designed to best meet their needs, concerns, and interests.
- Family literacy programs should move beyond cultural tokenism. For example, a Native American prayer wheel is a sacred artifact and not an object for children's play as some family literacy educators have suggested.

- As literacy educators find out more about the cultural and language resources of families that are available for learning and teaching, parents themselves can participate in this endeavor and have the opportunity to consider the many ways in which their own funds of knowledge and ways of knowing are worthy of pedagogical notice.
- Literacy practices in educational settings should broaden the opportunities for family members, including parents and children, to experience other types of literacy uses based on their personal and shared needs.

We must honor, validate, and use the languages of the parents and children who are enrolled in our schools and who participate in family literacy programs.

- English should not be taught at the cost of the home language. If the home language is not supported, cultural groups will be systematically destroyed.
- Speaking and being literate in more than one language creates social and intellectual resources that are antithetical to the concept of compensatory education.
- It seems that it is only in English-speaking cultures that fluency in more than one language is viewed as a deficit.

Principles for the Assessment of Family Literacy Programs

Assessment should be informative about the program and not a value judgment about the family members who are participating in the program.

- Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that the program meets the needs of the participants.
- Assessment should reflect the values and beliefs of the families participating in the program.
- Formal assessments – such as general certificates of education and general education diplomas – have a place within this framework when the goal of the family member is to study for the exam. The question then becomes: how successful is the family literacy educator in supporting the program participant in this endeavor?

Educators should resist large-scale assessments of family literacy programs. Standardized assessment measures should not be used in family literacy programs.

- Standardized assessment measures – which are falsely considered objective and neutral – create an imbalance in the power relationships between educators and family members participating in family literacy programs.
- School literacies dominate and family literacies are denied.
- There are no known standardized assessment measures that represent either family literacy or family literacy programs. Therefore the use of such "tests" is invalid.

- The use of standardized assessment measures can have adverse consequences for both family literacy educators and, more important, for the families who participate in family literacy programs.
- When funding is dependent on the performance of family members – usually economically disadvantaged mothers and their young children – educators will narrow instruction to preparation for "the test."
- Opportunities for family literacy educators to work collaboratively with family members on curriculum development is greatly reduced – or is simply not an option.
- Family members participating in the program are disadvantaged when family funds of knowledge are not valued and literacy opportunities are lost.
- The inherent cultural bias of all tests is particularly toxic to program participants from racial and ethnic groups who were not considered when the particular test was "normed."
- Program participants whose home language is different from the language of the test are also disadvantaged.

Family members should have the opportunity to work with educators to develop informative assessments of the family literacy program in which they are participating.

- If the purpose of assessment is to improve the quality of programming and the personal opportunities of family members to develop their many literacies, then the participants must be included in the development and implementation of the assessment procedures.
- When conversations about assessment take place, educators and program participants learn from one another and the observations of family members become important.
- The documentation of the strengths of a family literacy program by the program participants becomes the focus of discussion. Problems with the program are explored, tensions acknowledged, and solutions sought.
- Family members reflect on their own learning and make judgments about their own literacy development.

Principles for Educators and Funding Agencies

To speak of the rights of families to become literate implies that educators have a responsibility to provide such opportunities.

- Unfortunately, educators are often unable to fulfill their responsibilities to families because of competing obligations to fulfill the requirements of funding agencies.

- Educators are often caught between competing ideologies. For many educators, literacy is a human right, while for many funding agencies – both governmental and private – literacy is a political expedient.
- Many educators are deeply committed to their work as family literacy practitioners but are unable to work continuously with families because of the unrealistic, "quick fix" expectations of funding agencies.
- In schools, the family literacy work of teachers is often unrecognized. Schools rarely define education as a collaborative venture with families and communities.
- A question that some teachers ask is: How do you change your practice within an institution that resists change?

Educators should be encouraged to submit proposals that are not restrained by the requirement to meet the guidelines for a single dominant model of literacy which has no local relevance.

- When educators are given the opportunity to develop family literacy initiatives in a local community, generic standardized programs no longer work.
- When family members are included in the decision-making process, family literacy initiatives become participatory and inquiry-based. Educators work to establish partnerships so that every participant – family members and educators – have an equal voice in the development of the family literacy initiative.
- When educators and family members make decisions together, time frames change. Attending set classes every week for sixteen weeks is no longer the norm. Evenings and weekends become important. Participants might want to spend extended periods exploring the literacies of their families and their communities, responding to issues that affect their everyday lives, and establishing intergenerational literacy initiatives that bring elders and children together.
- Educators should recognize that the development of new literacy connections might take extended periods, which for communities to establish new literacies might take years.

Educators should be given the opportunity to develop assessment procedures with the families participating in the family literacy initiative.

- The imposition of standardized assessment procedures critically undermines both educators and families in their initiative to work together.
- Assessment should be informative, undertaken to improve the responsiveness of the family literacy initiative to needs of the families who participate.
- At the present time in the United States there are very few evaluators who are trained in such techniques.

- The emphasis of the external evaluation should be on the local purposes of the family literacy initiative.
- Educators and family participants should have the opportunity to play an active role in any external evaluation.

Principles for Policy Makers

All public policy regarding families and literacy should begin with the shared understanding that families have a right to define themselves.

- Family literacy programs should not be restricted to programs for "undereducated mothers and their young children."
- The rhetoric describing families that is used to obtain funding should be critically appraised. Negative propaganda and scare tactics should automatically exclude a proposal from funding consideration.

Families and communities have the right to voice their concerns, influence policy, and set agendas at local, national, and international levels.

- Finances and other resources must be committed to ensure the inclusion of voices that typically are not represented in the debate among academics, policy makers, and program developers.
- Constitutional frameworks guarantee equality in education. Deficit models should therefore be rejected, because they infringe on the rights of individuals within communities.
- Proposals for programs should recognize the contributions of families. Proposals should be written locally with the active participation of the families who would benefit from the program.
- National and international programs that have no local relevance should be automatically rejected.
- World organizations can provide funding and "technical assistance," but it is essential that decisions about family literacy initiatives be made locally.

Language and literacy development goes beyond the demands of economic development.

- Literacy for life means rejecting the dominant belief in unidirectional progress.
- Supporting literacy development supports families, helps develop strong communities, and celebrates life.
- When policy makers recognize the importance of local literacies, and when they support the development of programs that empower families to use their languages and literacies to express themselves, to manage the adversities in their own lives, to solve the social and

economic problems that confront them, to participate in the communities in which they live, and to live personally satisfying productive lives, then all families benefit.

- Similarly, bilingualism, which is often considered a major cause of illiteracy, can actually enhance the literacy opportunities of families. Speaking a second language should not be regarded as a problem. To the contrary, bilingualism can be thought of as knowing twice as much. In many cultures a person knowing only one language is considered uneducated.

Policies regarding family literacy programs do not eradicate the needs of families for adequate housing, food, and jobs.

- The question arises whether the focus on family (il)literacy programs by policy makers is another attempt to re-victimize families by shifting public attention away from societal problems, such as homelessness, lack of adequate housing, limited educational opportunities, and lack of jobs, that afflict family life.